

Martin Camaj.

*Weißgefiedert wie ein Rabe, Gedichte albanisch-deutsch / Me pendlat e korbit të bardhë, poezi shqip-gjermanisht.* Hans-Joachim Lanksch, tr.

Klagenfurt. Wieser. 1999. 207 pp. ISBN 3-85129-164-6. DM 38.

Enthusiasm was great during and after the demise of the Stalinist dictatorship in Albania a decade ago for the forbidden fruits of writer-in-exile, Martin Camaj (1925-1992). Even the name of this major contributor to Albanian letters had remained unknown to most readers up until 1990. Readers at home were fascinated by an Albanian author who had managed to escape from Enver Hoxha's surrealist republic and had found his niche as a respected professor in the bourgeois West. Since that time, interest has understandably died down somewhat. Reception of his verse written in Geg dialect and of his borderline prose has, not unexpectedly, proven trying for the average Albanian reader.

This being said, there are few authors who have managed to maintain a consistently high level of literary production and such a distinctive note in modern Albanian literature as Martin Camaj. It is thus quite proper that he should be in the vanguard of the handful of Albanian poets to be translated and made accessible to the international reading public. 'Feather-white like a raven' presents an excellent introduction to Camaj's verse production, though it is not the only translation of his works. The Italian-language volume *Poesie* (Palermo 1985) translated by Francesco Solano (1914-1999), an Italo-Albanian author of repute himself, was followed two by modestly successful collections in English: *Selected Poetry* (New York 1990) and *Palimpsest* (Munich & New York 1991), both translated by Leonard Fox [see WLT 65.4 (Autumn 1991), p. 746]. The first German-language translation, the now rare *Gedichte* (Munich 1991), was made by the Munich critic Hans-Joachim Lanksch who has now, after much delay, published this second, bilingual volume. The collection of eighty-eight poems is taken from the volume *Njeriu më vete e me tjerë* (Munich 1978), which Camaj published in exile at his own expense. The German version also includes translation notes both by Camaj and Lanksch, and a short bi-bibliographical sketch of the poet.

Martin Camaj once described the principal motifs of this poetry as follows: "Solitude, the fear of being alone. This fear has nothing to do with withdrawal from society and friends. I have had and still have enough company, but it has always been far removed from my intimate life. It is a conflict between opening oneself towards the outside world and withdrawal into oneself. This withdrawal is linked to a number of other motifs, as in 'In the shade of things,' 'Concert evening,' 'Guard at the national museum' and other poems which have to do with snow-covered landscapes. Linked to solitude is the motif of woman. Some people have interpreted this as a preference for the sensual, but I would say it is not only the sensual but something else - communication with life, a means of overcoming solitude. Deception in such contacts is to be found in the poems 'The snake and the woman,' 'The old stag,' 'The legend of Shota,' whereas the necessity of woman appears in 'What use is Ithaca to Ulysses without his wife?' Fear of the end of things, not only of life. The final coming is a silent one, on tiptoes, but it is also theatrical, accompanied by the din of avalanches and earthquakes. The motif of darkness or despair, by which a certain pleasure is to be found e.g. the darkness between the moment the stars go out and the moment the sun rises, i.e. darkness between two lights. Other dualist motifs are: the flight from one place to another, a longing in the north for the south, and the descent from alpine pastures to the lowlands. A number of objects of symbolic character: stone, birds and the

topology of north and south, occur frequently in this collection. The Italo-Albanians will certainly not understand the Italo-Albanian motifs because they live in reality there, whereas I rely on my imagination. I present what I myself feel about this world.”

‘Feather-white like a raven’ is an admirable collection which will certainly rank among the best volumes of Albanian verse in translation.

Robert Elsie  
Olzheim / Eifel, Germany